

## Other Ways To Say 'I Love You' by [Kiku\\_Takamoto](#)

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**Summary:**

Max questions Billy on why he never tells Steve 'I love you', Billy teaches Max other ways he and Steve express their love without ever saying those three words.

## 1. Affirmation

### Summary for the Chapter:

Affirmations: Words, whether verbal and non-verbal, that comfort, emphasize, uplift and support your partner in ways that can show your appreciation, point out their strengths, remind them of qualities that you admire about them and can become a positive habit that benefits your partners self esteem and self-worth.

Monday was here again, Max waited for her brother to pick her up from school. It had become routine; Steve would drive her to school (along with the party) while Billy would pick her up (and maybe sometimes El since she was the only friend of Max's he actually liked). People at school found it odd, but for Max it felt comforting, knowing that she had the stability she craved with the couple, more so than she ever could get at home. They even allowed her to stay at their place whenever things at home got too hard, if she had a fight with her friends or she wanted a safe place to get away from the boring and sometimes too consistent routine of everyday life. After so many visits to their place one thing always stuck to Max, Billy and Steve never said 'I love you' to each other. Even after a year of living together to save money for their move to California.

Maybe they told each other in private when no other ears were around? But Steve and Billy were used to Max and knew she wouldn't dare tell a soul, so there was no reason to hide it or avoid. This question bothered her curiosity the more she noticed it with each visit.

Today was the day she decided to settle her long gated curiosity.

“Billy?”

Billy never took his eyes off the road, even as he lowered Metallica on the radio, “Yes, shitbird?”

Max breathed in deeply, *“here goes nothing”*, “Why don’t you tell Steve you love him?”

Billy nearly slammed his breaks, as soon as they got to the nearest stop sign on the deserted road he turned to Max, looking between startled and offended, “Who said I didn’t love him?”

“*Shit*,” Max knew, even after a year of calming his anger and confronting the demons in his life, the one sure fire way to spark Billy’s anger to life was to question his relationship with Steve.

“Not like that! I mean, whenever I visit you guys never say ‘I love you’. Even Neil says it to mom on a daily basis,” Max explained quickly to avoid any (more) possible misunderstandings in her questions intent.

The response she got was not what she expected. Billy all but laughed as soon as he digested the information. Max went from panicked to confused within seconds, it still amazed her how quickly Billy’s moods could change.

“Maxine,’ he chuckled, inhaling more of his nicotine stick, ‘Did you really just Neil as an example of expressing genuine love?’

Max wanted to face palm herself. Billy settled his laughter down before driving again towards his and Steve's place, "Trust me, just cause Neil says 'I love you' doesn't mean he actually understand shit about love. Saying 'I love you' and actually showing someone you love them are two ballparks."

Now Max was intrigued, she smiled when she saw Billy smile. She knew he was thinking about Steve.

"How do you tell Steve you love him without saying a word?"

Billy grinned back, he purposely took another road, the longer route to his apartment. Max knew at that moment whatever story Billy was going to tell was going to be long.

"Let me example the few different ways I and pretty boy say 'I love you', with no vocal cords required."

## Affirmations

It was late Friday night and Steve couldn't sleep. As soon as heard the shower stop and Billy open the door after blow drying his hair, Steve made his move to ask for a night time remedy.

"Hey, Hargrove? We got anymore chamomile tea-"

In the bathroom stood Billy, staring at himself intensely in the mirror. His scared fingers danced over the scars that littered his chest and torso from the night the Demogorgon nearly took his life. Steve felt his stomach drop.

Everyone on the outside would probably assume if they were in Billy's shoes they would be 'grateful' to be alive or would only see the scars as being artificial roots for concern. But Steve and rest of those involved in the Upside Down knew it was far more then that.

For several nights Billy would wake up in a cold sweat, sometimes getting into the shower with boiling hot water muttering that 'he' was still in inside of him and needed to be destroyed. Or would find other methods to punish himself for 'murdering' thirty people such as depriving himself of food, sleep or even sexual pleasure. It didn't matter what the facts were or what Joyce, Hopper, Owens or anyone else said, to Billy the scars were always a reminder of what he 'did' to those innocent people. Steve didn't care what anyone said, everyone was capable of feeling the weight of their trauma. The weight Billy was carrying was overwhelming.

That was when Steve began his routine of positive affirmations.

As he entered the room, Steve made sure he was making enough noise with his feet to alert Billy of his presence. The last thing he wanted was to scare Billy and make him insecure in his own apartment. Steve wrapped his pale arms around the blonde tightly, Billy didn't fight back, but his trance on his scars didn't waiver either.

"You are an amazing brother to Max, it takes a really strong badass type of person to want to start over," Billy said nothing, he only listened. His fingers continued to slide around the rough calloused

skin.

Steve wasn't one to give up on the first sentence.

'I couldn't have gotten such a high SAT score without you, you work so hard at school already. Yet, you're always there when I need you,' Steve barely heard a huff of laughter.

He hugged Billy tighter, 'I hope you know that my favorite part of the day is seeing you when you come home.'

Billy remained silent, but this time he allowed himself to look at Steve's reflection. Steve smiled, it was a small improvement.

'You always can talk to me if you ever need someone to talk to,' Steve buried his face in the crook of the tan warm skin, 'I'm know I'm a dingus, but I want to try my best for you, yeah?"

Billy felt his trademark smirk return to his face. To him it was almost humorous. Had his past self been in this situation he probably would have done everything in the book to save his 'macho' image, but now ... now he could allow himself to feel content, free and able to enjoy the sweet words. Because Steve was the type who gave without threat or expectation of something in return, something still so foreign yet so welcoming to Billy. It reminded of the traits he loved so much about his memories with his mother.

"Thank you, Harrington,' before he could turn around to look straight

at Steve, the high pitched mewling below the pair caught his attention. Bela, their skinny black cat, decided to comfort her human by rubbing her warm body again this leg. Billy chuckled dryly picking up the feline with ease, ‘Ok, ok, you’re not so bad either.’

“She always says the right things,” Steve cooed at the cat while scratching her ears, any desire for sleep was lost on him. Billy shook his head but couldn’t bring himself to break the moment.

“Even though she still chokes on her own fur,” Steve slapped his arm lightly before leading himself and Billy to their living room. Billy watched Steve play with their cat as he went to grab beer from their fridge, it made him oddly happy. For the rest of evening, he felt completely content. His negative thoughts were put to rest for the rest of the evening.

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Max grinned from ear to ear, she saw Billy’s grin plastered on his face too as he recalled the emotions he felt from that night.

“Do you do that for Steve too?”

“Maybe,’ Max quirked an eyebrow, Billy sensed it without giving his sister a glance, ‘Ok, I do but he’s an expert at it compared to me. He can express it with ease. I can think it with ease but thinking it and saying it outload are two totally differently games. Thankfully pretty boy doesn’t mind.’

Max nodded slowly, it made sense to her. Billy always acted smooth when it come to putting on an act (specially to fool Neil after their move), but when it came to his real emotions and feelings putting them into words was easier said than done.

‘Now pay attention, Shitbird. That's just chapter one, I have more to go through,’ at the stop sign Billy turned to Max, lifting his sunglasses to look straight a Max, ‘Unless you’re already bored and prefer Neil’s way of expressing lo-“

“No, no. continue,” She received a shiteating grin in return. Billy continued to drive, finding more and more roads to eat up more time he needed for his next ‘lecture’.

“The next one is –“

## 2. Quality Time

### Summary for the Chapter:

Quality time: Love that is centered around spending time with your partner with your undivided attention so they may feel loved, cherished and prioritized during your time alone.

“The next one is -“

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### Quality Time

The nighttime air was getting colder. With September already in Hawkins, Billy and Steve enjoyed the last of the few warm nights they could before it would become too cold to stay outside comfortably. Currently, they were on the hood of the Camaro, listening to whatever the radio was playing at the moment.

The night sky was probably one of the few things Billy liked about Hawkins. Living in LA never allowed him to see the night sky due to the pollution, but in small town Hawkins, Billy could see stars he had only ever seen in textbooks and outdated photographs. That, some beer, some good music and sitting next a certain pretty boy also made watching the night sky much more relaxing.

Little words were spoken between the two, which neither minded too much. Sometimes they bantered about which bands were the best,

complain about politics or even argue about some of the most absolutely ridiculous topics imaginable. They loved it.

Tonight, however, they simply enjoyed being near each other. It sounded so stereotypical, to sit in the dark, looking at the stars with your significant other, but it was one of Billy's favorite things to do with Steve. He enjoyed the little stimuli required to enjoy himself and in that moment he could forget about the troubles of the outside world. School, work, looking after his annoying sister and her friends, all was a temporary hold on nights like these.

For the next couple hours, the two boys stayed huddled against each other until it became really late. They dreaded separating from the peaceful moment, but in the end, they both knew full well the disappointment wouldn't last for long.

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“Ok, I’m just going bite the bullet and ask, what the actual hell are you doing?”

Billy watched with silent bemusement at what was in front of him in the living room. Steve had been watching their cat roll around in different positions that would break any normal person’s neck with ease, but that didn’t deter Steve, instead he decided to turn it into a weird yoga session. Which in translation meant Steve was bored as hell and copying his cat was free entertainment (both for himself and Billy).

Steve strained a grunt as he tried curling his back as round as Bella

made hers while she stretched after her cat nap, he met eyes with Billy who was watching the ‘session’ from their thrifited couch.

“Hey, if a cat can do it and be fast and limber, then it must be good for you, right?”

“You want to shit in a sandbox too?” Billy deadpanned.

Steve snorted, “You have no imagination, Hargrove.”

Billy raised his hands in defeat, he knew the faster he complicated with his boyfriends’ ridiculous game the sooner they could do something more fun ... such as ‘wrestling’ in bed.

As soon as Billy tired copying Bella he felt the strain in his back, *“Holy shit, pretty boy is right, this actually is a workout.”*

But he wasn’t going to admit defeat right away.

Steve smirked at watching Billy struggle, it was one of the few times being bulky with muscle was not an advantage whereas Steve’s slimmer muscular form made it easier to twist himself into a ‘cat-pretzel’

“Ready to give up, Hargrove?”

“I don’t think so, amigo. This is too easy,” Billy declared, despite his face turning red. Currently Steve was able to bend back with his head touching the back on his feet while laying on the floor, meanwhile Billy looked ready to snap at any moment from his strain.

Steve chuckle lightly as Billy tried so hard to copy their cat, who cared no thought or attention to the two men trying to copy her.

“Really? I don’t think even your sunburnt face was as red as it is now,” Steve had no time to blink before he felt himself being flipped over and lifted into the ground. The firm grip around his back and arms under his knees as he was lifted up and down told Steve all he needed to know.

“Really? You’re gonna use me as a gym weight?”

Billy licked his teeth slowly at Steve, “What? I thought you wanted a good workout? What’s a better work out then lifting up a pretty boy?”

Steve rolled his eyes as he felt Billy do squats while keeping a firm grip on him, “And you call me a dork?”

Without warning Billy threw Steve against the couch, and launched himself on top of the brunette. Steve muffled his laughter as the warm breath from Billy tickled his neck, “You’re in your own special league of dorkiness, Harrington. But have to say a monster fighting pretty boy Italian babysitter is far more intriguing than any bloat headed cow in Hawkins.”

“Oh really?” Steve challenged, brushing pieces of curly hair behind Billy’s ear as the blue eyes stared him down, ‘You want to give me more time to hear all your reasons?’

Billy leaned down to where he and Steve were touching nose to nose.

“You ask dumb questions better than anyone I know,’ his smile grew, ‘I like it.”

For the rest of the afternoon, they laid together on the couch talking and chatting about random topics until they both fell asleep. Bella copied her owners, falling asleep right in her beloved package box (instead of the \$20 bed Steve had bought her).

In other words, all sense, definition and meaning of quality time was the boy’s favorite way of spending the afternoon.

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“You guys really tried copying your cat?” Max asked after finally recovering from her laughing bit at hearing what her brother and Steve did when they were bored.

Billy scoffed at the redhead.

“That was Harrington’s brilliant idea, I’m just explaining some exhibits that aren’t R rated,” Max shut herself up on the spot. She was both grateful and mortified that Billy admitted to avoiding anything having to do with their sex lives. She didn’t care if they were straight, gay or whatever, imagining her brother and her mom-figure like babysitter was something she never ever wanted to visualize. Max could be forty and still wouldn’t feel old enough to hear any details.

She cleared her throat, hoping to forget her own mortification, “You said you did other things too? To tell Steve you love him?”

Billy continued driving, taking one last puff of his cigarette.

“Yup,’ he stated, popping the ‘p’ at the end, ‘The next chapter you will learn is-“

**Notes for the Chapter:**

PSA: Cats the supreme yoga masters

### **3. Physical Touch**

#### **Summary for the Chapter:**

Physical touch: Showing love and affection through intimate and non-intimate touch, physical closeness and other physical acts of closeness.

“The next chapter you will learn is-“

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#### **Physical Touch**

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The damn heater was broken. On top of that it was wintertime, in Hawkins. To say both Steve and Billy were miserable was putting lightly.

“Is this how the fuckers on the Titanic felt when it sank?” Billy stuttered in their blankets.

Steve rolled his eyes, it was now going on hour two of listening to Billy complain. To say he wanted to stuff a sock in his mouth was the understatement of the week, “It’s like 40 degrees, Hargrove. It’s not that bad-“

“I’m shriveling up here, Harrington!”

Steve scuffed at the heat starved Californian.

“You’re such a baby,” he grumbled in his warm sheet body cocoon. Billy narrowed his glare the human burrito.

“Well excuse fucking me, but in California cold weather is 60 degrees! At least in that weather my balls aren’t trying to go back to where they dropped!”

Steve turned around to face the whine-sack named Billy Hargrove, he was not willing to hear more complaints until the heater turned back on.

“We could do skin to skin,” Billy gawked back.

“What?”

Steve scooted closer.

“Skin to skin, in school they said if you’re really cold you can do skin to skin for severe hypothermia- what are you doing?”

Steve hadn’t even finished a sentence and there Billy was, stripping faster than a stripper in the summer heat. Billy looked at Steve with clear impatience in his eyes.

“I’m cold and I’m cold now!” before Steve could even blink Billy forced Steve out of his covers and all but ripped his PJ top off. The cold air hardened the nips on his chest in an instant. Steve was now cold, mortified and regretting ever telling that piece of information. Couldn’t they be cold and miserable in peace?

“What are you doing?!”

“You take too long to strip,’ Billy explained, throwing his and Steve’s shirts on the floor, ‘You said getting nakie is the best right?’

“Y-Yeah?”

“Then we are all good to go,’ Billy huddled himself and Steve under the sheets. Steve had no problem leaning against the warm skin to escape the cold air. Billy snuggled Steve’s face against his chest as he rubbed his fingers against the warm skin on the mole covered back.

‘This is ....’ Billy paused curiously tracing his fingers along the numerous moles, as if they following a consolation map of the night time sky, ‘Nice.’

“Hmm,” Steve moaned. Billy smirked watching and hearing Steve’s breath even out as he relaxed under the callused fingers.

“Harrington?”

“Hmm?”

“This is kinda nice,’ he hugged Steve closer to him, suddenly the room felt really hot under the hug, ‘Too bad we can’t do this once we move to California.”

Steve looked up at Billy, his lids halfway open, the gentle touches and caressment lulled him into a relaxed state.

“We can always turn up the AC for a few minutes.”

Billy looked back at Steve in faux shock.

“Using your brain? Who are you and what have you done with pretty boy?”

“Fuck you,” Steve mumbled, burying his face in the scared skin of Billy’s chest. Billy licked his lips while his hands traveled to Steve’s lower back.

“Now, now, don’t get my hopes up, princess.”

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The diner was packed with people, which was a blessing in disguise

for Steve and Billy. Being shoved into a quiet small corner of the restaurant meant a few perks. One; the restaurant goers couldn't see them as well, two; the waitstaff were less likely to bother them and three; they couldn't get away with more physical acts of touch because everyone was so distracted by each other they didn't care to be snoopy.

Small town politics meant if you were caught doing something gay or 'abnormal' you were instantly the talk of the town, whether that be good or bad. So, staying hush-hush was a must for them, but on days on like this they could hold hands under the table as they chatted over crappy cheap coffee and pancakes that were within their budget.

Billy shook his head as he listened to Steve rant on about his recent night helping the brats with their typical newbie high school problems that he knew full well about. He even about being exhausted in general for taking classes to earn his associates degree so he could transfer to California State University.

During that hour of random rambling Billy would rub his thumb on top of Steve's hand, knowing that he could confidently touch his boyfriend without a waitress or random bored diner zeroing in on them. Sometimes to get a reaction of Steve he would slide his leather boot up his calf, which usually earned a small of surprise that never failed to make Billy laugh. Sure, it looked corny at times, but teasing and riling up his partner never failed to make Billy smile. The small touches and acts of affection woke something in Billy he never thought he was capable of feeling, Steve was no one nightstand, sexual exploration experiment or enemy with benefits, he was Billy's world .

Billy loved expressing affection in every little way to his world.

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Max felt a sense of happiness and sadness after hearing the stories. It was bittersweet.

“I’m sorry you have to hide stuff like that in public. So many people practically eat each other’s faces but you and Steve can’t even hold hands-“

“It’s fine, shitbird,’ Billy breathed out slowly. Max could hear the amount of self-control her brother was trying to practice through his breath, ‘I don’t need to eat Harrington’s face to feel included and sure hell don’t need validation from a hick that has been married three times and then complains about the fags destroying society.”

Max cringed at the harsh wording, but she had more important question to ask.

“What else do you got?”

“You’re not satisfied yet, Maxine?” Billy challenged.

“I got nowhere to be,” Max retorted.

“Not even with Sinclair?” Max pursed her lips impatiently.

“Billy-“

“Ok, ok,’ Billy interrupted, drawing out another cigarette to take a ‘healthy’ dose before continuing, ‘But pay attention, cause I ain’t repeating myself and I got about ten minutes until we pull up the apartment.”

For the first time Max saw it was getting slightly dark outside, she hadn’t realized how much time she and Billy had been talking. It surprised her how soothing it was to have a regular, normal conversation with her brother without it turning into a screaming match.

“Ok, what the next one?”

Billy smirked as he watched the road in front of him, “That’s more like it.”

## 4. Acts of Service

### Summary for the Chapter:

Acts of Service: Using actions to go above and beyond to help your partner feel loved, in other words expressing and communicating love through thoughtful gestures.

“Ok, what the next one?”

Billy smirked as he watched the road in front of him, “That’s more like it.”

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### Acts of Service

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“I think I’m dying,” Steve moaned in the cool sheets. As much as Billy loved Steve, he hated it when he got sick. No, not because Steve wasn’t feeling well (ok, maybe he was lying a little bit) but because Steve always managed to be the biggest complainer when he was sick. A complete stranger would probably assume Steve was being poisoned slowly with arsenic or had a horrible incurable disease that was killing him from the inside out.

But no, it was the common flu.

*"Princess? More like the Drama Queen of Hawkins."*

“You have the flu, amigo. Last I check, only old fucks die from the flu,” Billy responded blankly. He grabbed the cold wash clothe placing it on the simmering forehead . Steve whimpered under the cold clothe.

“But the kids, I was supposed to pick them up-“

As soon as he tried to get up Billy forced him back down. The task of restraining the baby-sitter wasn't that hard considering how much the flu weakened the normally efficient monster hunter.

“Whoa, whoa. You aren't going anywhere,' Billy chided, attempting to force Steve back under the covers, 'Besides I already made arrangements.”

Steve raised an eyebrow, “What?”

“Made a quick call to Wheeler and older Byers. They got it all taken care of.”

This caught Steve off guard. He knew Billy wasn't the biggest fan of either them. As soon as Billy heard all the details about Halloween Bash party and what the pair had been doing Nancy and Jonathan instantly took up the top five spot on his shitlist. To call them and act nice enough to get them to do what he wanted was a hard pill for Billy swallow and tolerate, Steve knew that much.

“Oh ... thanks Hargro-“

Steve felt another coughing fit over take him again. Had it not been for Billy holding him up, his coughing fit would have gone on until he saw white dots form in his vision.

“Ok, that’s it. Come on, let’s get to bed,’ Steve groaned, finally allowing Billy to wrap the blankets around him, ‘That’s right. Nice and comfy sheets.”

“My eyes are dancing,” Steve slurred. The dizziness and delirium he felt from his coughing fits was finally getting to him.

“Go to sleep, Stevie,” Billy muttered softly into the sweaty hair that stuck to Steve’s neck. He hugged the coughing figure until he felt only even breathes leave Steve. Without moving the sheets too much Billy walked out, giving Steve one last look before shutting the door behind him.

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Steve groaned at the sweat rolling down his face. As soon as he woke up, he felt the pain. His head hurt, his chest hurt, his throat craved something to smooth the painful ripples- his eyes immediately saw a beautiful site. A Hot drink with the scent honey, lemon and ... whisky?

Then he saw the quickly written note on the nightstand.

***“MADE HOT TODDY\*. GOING TO DRUGSTORE. STAY IN BED.”***

Steve shook his head, even when Billy was away, he still gave orders. But in cases like this he couldn't help but love it. It felt nice to have someone take care of him and to not think or feel any stress while he recovered.

He slid himself into an upright position before cupping his hands around the warm cup. As soon as the liquid hit his tongue Steve felt his face crinkle from the strength of the whisky.

*“Jesus, Hargrove. This can make an Irish man feel the heat,”* Steve coughed at the liquid going down his throat. But he couldn't deny it, the warm liquid felt like heaven on his throat. Within minutes Steve finished the drink, shortly deciding to go back into his dream state.

The first thing Billy saw when he got home was his pretty boy huddled under the mountain of blankets and their cat curled up in ball next to her human servant. Billy quietly placed the aspirin on the table, removing the empty glass from the nightstand. He turned around leaving the door open, he didn't want to disrupt Steve's sleep.

Then again, Steve was one of the very few people he didn't mind waiting on until he got better

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“Bullshit job, bullshit day, bullshit boss! Bullshit! *Bullshit!*” Billy was two seconds away from his slamming his fist into the BMW’s steering wheel. Everything about that day was screwed up.

First, the Camaro wouldn’t start so he had to borrow Steve’s car (it was a small stroke of luck Steve had the day off), two, his supervisor gave him the worst customers to deal with in the mechanic shop, three, his paycheck was ‘late’ and four, his boss had the fuckin balls to lecture and criticize Billy for not wanting to be set up with his puppy eyed daughter.

Billy’s hands shook in rage as he struggled to open the door, “*Even if I was on the straight and narrow, I still wouldn’t date that horse faced slu-*“

“Heyo, Hargrove!”

The aroma of shrimp, pasta and spices filled Billy’s nose the second he closed the door behind him. He abandoned his coat and wallet on the couch to investigate.

“Hi, Harr- What are you making?” Billy didn’t need an explanation, he knew exactly what it was. He just wanted to hear the confirmation with his own ears.

“Shrimp scampi, I know it’s your favorite,” Billy felt a small knot grow in his throat. Despite his tough exterior, his interior always went soft whenever Steve performed small surprises like this for him. Especially after a day like he had.

“Princess, this takes like two hours-“

“I can tell time, Hargrove,’ Steve chastised, turning off the heat to the stove while using his shoulder to whip the sweat from his brow, ‘You sounded upset on the phone earlier, so I made … this.’

Billy said nothing, his owl-like stare was the only response Steve got.

‘I know it’s stupid, pasta won’t cure your crappy day, but better then nothing right-“

Billy forced Steve to turn around, pecking the brunette playfully on the lips. The tired mechanic chuckled at the surprised expression on Steve’s face.

“You talk too much, Harrington.”

Steve beamed, shaking his head while he grabbed a bowl for himself and Billy, “Then you’re in luck, the pasta is ready, and I have plenty of white wine left over.”

“Why don’t you love spoiling me rotten?” Steve’s face became even more red as he watched Billy purposely lick the spicy lemon white wine sauce that threatened to drip from his lips.

“Just eat, you sauce dripping asshole.”

Billy grinned, despite the crappy day, at least it got relaxing ending. Plus, a flustered attractive Italian sitting right across from him was a pretty nice bonus.

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“Wait, so that’s why Steve wasn’t around that day?”

“Yup, I listened to Harrington hack up his lungs for a whole week,’ Max crinkled her face in disgust, she could almost hear Steve’s coughing up phlegm from the description alone, ‘I had to stop smoking for a whole week to give his pretty lungs some fresh air.”

Max’s eyebrows shot up to her hairline. Billy never gave up his cigarettes for anyone. *Anyone*. This alone said so much about Billy. More than the dictionary could ever describe.

“That explains why you were a bigger asshole then normal that week,’ Billy sarcastically laughed, waving his middle finger in full view of his siter.

Max pushed his shoulder playfully, ‘But hey, at least your boyfriend can cook without nearly destroying the kitchen.”

Billy cackled, rolling his eyes as he imagined the nerds panicking as

they set fire to whatever they were attempting to make. He knew he wasn't one to talk about good culinary skills. But at least he knew enough not to destroy the kitchen (or be yelled at by Steve).

"I'm giving one more freebee, shitbird. So listen up, buttercup," Max eyed Billy, feeling a mix of fascination and fear, she had no idea if Billy would choose this time to be gross and descriptive about his private life with Steve. Nor did she notice that they were only minutes away from the apartment.

Billy took off his sunglasses, discarding them in his glove box as he continued on, 'The final chapter is-"

#### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Hot Toddy's are a drink with honey, herbs, spices and whiskey that was traditionally meant to soothe sore throats or lull you to sleep in cold weather.

## 5. Receiving Gifts

### Summary for the Chapter:

Receiving Gifts: Receiving or giving gifts that symbolize a persons love, though certain acts of gift giving are not always purely materialistic. Some of the best gifts are well thought out and have hidden depth to allow the gift giver to show sincerity and connection to their partner on an intimate level.

Billy took off his sunglasses, discarding them in his glove box as he continued on, ‘The final chapter is-“

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### Receiving Gifts

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“Happy birthday!”

Billy nearly skyrocketed out of his seat from the couch at the loud noise. As much as he wanted to curse out Steve for nearly making his heart jump out of his chest, the envelope in Steve’s hand was far more intriguing. The huge grin that Steve failed to hide made this far more suspicious.

Blue eyes looked at Steve in confusion.

*“Did pretty boy get another concussion?”*

“Harrington? My birthday is in November, that was like three months ago,” Steve forced the envelope in Billy’s hand despite the small protests.

“Great, now use that as distraction while you open this,” Billy sighed blowing a piece of hair out of his face. He knew Steve wouldn’t give up until Billy complied, the sooner he played along with Steve’s shenanigans the sooner he could get whatever the brunette had in store over with.

“Let me guess another late electric bill?”

“No, but I’m sure it’s something you won’t want to leave unopened,” Billy’s eyebrows knotted in puzzlement. The content in the envelope didn’t feel like a bill, family card or anything else he was familiar with.

Then he pulled out what was inside.

“Whatever you say, pretty-‘Billy’s eyes grew into wide eyed saucers. He couldn’t take his eyes off of what he was holding in his hand, ‘boy.’”

Steve’s grin was now so big it started to hurt his cheeks.

“Stefano?” Billy breathed.

“Si?”

“Is this what I think I’m holding? Or did that government crap mess with my eyesight too?”

Steve chuckled, sitting down next to Billy who held the ticket stubs as if they were the most valued treasure in the whole world that would break at even the slightest movement, “If what you think you’re seeing is two Metallica tickets, then your vision is 100% correct.”

Without a second thought Billy placed the tickets on the coffee table before all but tackling Steve to the couch. Steve laughed at the engulfing hug and peppered kisses to the neck.

Billy wriggled himself up to Steve’s face, “You really are as sweet as fucking apple pie.”

Steve snorted, patting Billy on the back, “You can thank me later.”

Billy grinned, already agreeing to whatever ‘thank you’ Steve had in mind. Steve then sat them both back up, handing the ticket stubs back over to Billy.

‘But now you have something important. The concert is tonight-“

“Is that why you asked if I had today off?”

“Bingo,’ Steve winked. He playfully shoved Billy to the direction of their room ‘The concert is tonight. So you better get dressed and ready soon if you want to pick up your partner in crime-“

“Whoa, you’re not going?” Billy stopped, turning around to face Steve, who looked unconcerned by the surprised look on his boyfriend’s face.

“Let’s just say Madmax is really looking forward to spending more time with her brother and she expects you to pick her up at five, so you two can make it the venue by seven,” Billy could only gawk at Steve. The surprise was so much then any gift or present Billy had received in his life, this gift not only allowed him to see his favorite band but also gave him a chance to reconnect with his sister, possibly connecting with in a way Neil never allowed him before.

“Thank you … Harrington.”

Steve beamed, happily accepting a bone crushing hug from the slightly shorter male.

“Have fun, bring me back something,’ he forced Billy to turn around, this time all but pushing him into their bedroom, slapping the blonde’s perky ass, ‘Go! You take forever to get ready!”

Billy let a small chackle, “That’s big coming from you pretty boy-“

“Yeah, yeah.”

...

Max was almost too shocked to say anything. Metallica concert tickets and Steve were two things Max would never put together.

“Wait, Steve was the one to get those tickets?”

“Yup,’ Billy confirmed, ‘But you didn’t hear that from me. As far as he’s concerned you still don’t know, got it?”

“Got it,” Max agreed, memories of that flashed in her mind. It was a amazing night, even her dates with Lucas and hangouts with El couldn’t compete with the exactment and adrenaline she felt the night from the echo of the instruments all the way down to the crowd screaming around her.

The smile on her face grew exponentially at the memory of Billy lifting her on his shoulders so she could capture some moments with crappy polaroid’s of the band on stage. She thought she would be embarrassed but, in its place, she felt excitement and adrenaline she never felt before. In other words, one of the most exciting nights of her life was all thanks to Steve. the middleman of a great memory.

Billy tapping his fingers impatiently on the back of her head rest was the only thing that snapped her out of memory lane.

“I have one more example and then I am done for the night. So, listen up, cherry head.”

...

It was the beginning of March, which meant everyone in Hawkins was either wearing summer wear already or were still donning their winter clothing, at least for another few weeks until the temperature went up three or so degrees.

“Can’t believe how nice it is outside,” Steve smiled. Seeing the clear quarry water always made him happy, it meant no more depressing weather for a few more months. Billy on the other hand didn’t share his enthusiasm.

“Yeah, a whooping fifty degrees! Soon it will be bikini land!”

Steve stared deadpanned at the smoking blonde, he knew for Billy anything under sixty five degrees was ‘winter’ weather, “Can you not be a sarcastic asshole for two seconds?”

“You love it,” Billy smirked, puffing out his finished drag. A gust a wind overtook the two boys for a few seconds before dying down. the shivering that escaped Steve’s skin was not lost onto Billy.

“You cold, pretty boy?”

“Just a chill,” Steve mumbled, trying (unsuccessfully) to hide the goosebumps invading his pale skin. Billy rolled his eyes; he knew Steve wouldn’t admit to anything he thought would inconvenience Billy. He was still very much a people pleaser with those he cared about. Without a second more of the cold air, Steve felt an already warm brown leather jacket wrap around him securely.

He looked to his side to see Billy only in his button downed shirt.

“Billy? Aren’t you cold?”

“No, pretty boy,’ Billy leaned in closer, hugging he slightly skinner boy tighter, ‘Just think of it as a small loan from me. Whenever you’re cold my jacket is your jacket. No permission required.”

Steve felt the tickle on his neck at the mustache prickling at his skin as Billy buried his face into his neck and hair.

“Hargrove?” Billy stilled, giving Steve his full attention, ‘You’re such a softy sometimes.”

“Shut up and enjoy my jacket, Harrington,” Billy grumbled hugging Steve tighter.

Steve scoffed, finding Billy’s hand. Simply holding the hand as Billy made himself comfortable at the award angle and against the cold

breeze that he no doubt would complain about later.

“Love you too, asshole.”

But Steve wouldn’t have it any other way.

...

“And that shitbird is why we don’t to say I love you everyday,” Billy finished, the grin on his face made Max’s heart swell. It made her happy to see Billy so happy and content after so many years of trials and tribulations.

“Do you ever say it though? Just for the hell of it?”

“Pretty boy does, but he likes using his Italian. Something about it being more meaningful in his native tongue-”

“Billy?”

“Ok, ok. Jesus, you’re a persistent one,’ Billy jested, parking his car in his rented spot, ‘Yes, sometimes I do, happy?”

Max rolled her eyes shaking her head. Some things really never do change.

“You’re an asshole, but I like having you are around,” Billy leaned over playfully jabbing his sister’s forehead with his finger with just enough force to gently force her head back.

“Right back at you, shitbird,’ he saluted with his two fingers, Max laughed dryly making sure he could see her flip the bird before leaving the Camaro. Billy locked up his car before leading himself and Max to the top of the shabby apartment building, ‘now come on. pretty sure princess had his stuff nearly done.”

“You never cook with him?”

“Nope, after burning pasta he banned me from ever entering the kitchen,” Max froze, her eyes widened in bewilderment.

“How did you burn pasta-“

“HOLY SHIT!” a voice screamed.

Max and Billy looked at each other before all but barging inside. The concern and anxiety of hearing Steve’s screams was all to discerning.

“Steve?! Steve?” Billy shouted throwing his stuff on a nearby table. He turned to Max, giving one simple command, ‘Stay here.’

Max stood behind the ouch, knowing that she may need to make a run for it if the situation is beyond Billy and Steve’s control.

A plate crashing on the floor made Max nearly jump a foot in the air.

“Steve!? Ste- what the fuck?!” now Billy sounded just as panicked as Steve. Max felt even more afraid, she knew if Billy of people freaking out this had to be serious.

“She brought another rat in from outside! A rat, Hargrove!”

Max stared at the direction their voice in disbelief. She slowly inched towards where the kitchen was while keeping out of sight of Billy. She couldn’t see them, but she could hear them.

“That things fucking huge! What the fuck, Bella- Harrington, put the nail bat down its dead! For fucks sake!”

Max found herself staring at direction, feeling too dumbfounded to even take in the situation.

*“All this over a dead rat?”*

She didn’t know whether to laugh or feel disgusted by the fact a dead rodent was in her brothers apartment.

*Meow*

Rubbing against her was the culprit responsible for all the panic, Steve and Billy's cat; Bella. Max shook her head at the feline as she sat herself down on the couch, to which Bella gladly took refuge in the new company's lap.

Max smiled as Bella sniffed her face and hair, clearly not caring about invading her space, "Let me guess, that's how you tell them you love them?"

Bella looked at Max as of agreeing with what the visitor was stating. Max's inner observation was then proven correct as the skinny black feline headbutted the redhead fondly with purrs filling the room.

Max laughed at the needy cat's clinginess, "Ok, ok. Let me do something to show you I love you too."

Bella purred louder in approval as she melted into the under-chin pets Max gave her. For the next minutes, Max went back and forth from hearing Steve and Billy argue over who was responsible for disposing this week's rodent to Bella purring away at the job well done of providing food for her human servants.

This night was so much more meaningful then Max couldn't ever imagine.

#### **Author's Note:**

Billy deserved better, you can't change my mind -  
From a depressed lesbian who craves a relationship  
like the one I'm writing

🏳️ Happy Pride! (Not just in June but all year round) 🏳️